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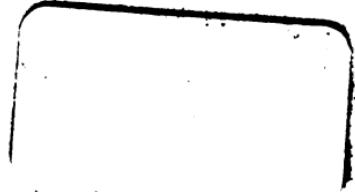
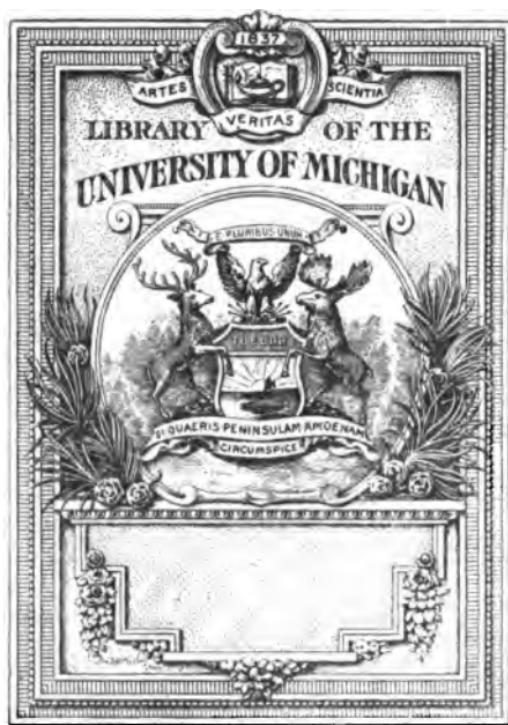
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A Business Meeting

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A Parlor Play in One Act 95

By ARLO BATES
Author of "A Gentle Jury," etc.

BOSTON
WALTER H. BAKER & CO

1905

A Business Meeting

CHARACTERS

MRS. GILFLORA SMITHE, *President of the Rosedale Sewing Circle.*

MISS SELINA GRAY, *Secretary.*

MRS. SAMPSON HOYT.

MRS. MERCY BROWNE.

MRS. CROWLER.

MRS. HENDERSON.

MRS. LOWELL.

MISS ARAMINTA SHARP.

MISS KEENE.

MISS WHITE.

COSTUMES.—Modern.



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A Business Meeting

SCENE.—*A parlor. In the centre at the back a table, behind which is an armchair, unoccupied. On the table a gavel, and at one end materials for writing. Chair at this end in which sits Miss KEENE turned away from table. All the ladies are present, seated about the room in groups, but in general conversation. All are in bonnets or hats except MRS. LOWELL. MRS. SMITHE stands on one side of the stage with her hand on the back of the chair in which sits Miss WHITE. It is better to begin a sort of buzz of conversation before the curtain rises, so that it will seem as if talk was in full movement. The actual dialogue is, of course, not to be taken up until the curtain is fully drawn.*

MRS. CROWLER. Of course I don't want to blame my pastor's wife, but —

MISS WHITE. Nobody would want to do that.

MRS. HOYT (*majestically*). But it is certainly proper to remark that she has no right to set an example of extravagance.

MISS W. It certainly is.

MRS. LOWELL. Are you sure, Miss Sharp, that there isn't any mistake?

MISS SHARP. I'm not in the habit of making mistakes, Mrs. Lowell, about things I tell. She told me herself. I asked her how much she sweetened her sweet pickle, and she said she put in half a cupful of sugar to a quart.

MRS. HENDERSON. But perhaps it was brown sugar. Did she say granulated?

MISS W. Yes, perhaps it was brown sugar.

MISS S. I asked her particularly. I said : "What kind of sugar do you use, Mrs. Davis?" And she said : "Rather coarse granulated."

MISS KEENE. Of course that settled it. (*She says this so meaningfully that they all look at her. She smiles broadly, but*

they look puzzled until she adds.) It was coarse sugar, you know. (*They laugh feebly.*)

MISS W. Oh, how funny.

MRS. L. Well, after all, granulated sugar is only five cents a pound.

MRS. SMITHE. Six now.

MRS. HOYT. Not if you buy it in quantity. We always get twenty pounds at a time, and we only pay five cents and three-quarters.

MRS. BROWNE. But it's the principle of the thing. Brown sugar is just as good for sweet pickles, and it's extravagant to use granulated.

MISS S. I should think molasses was good enough for a poor minister's wife.

MRS. HEN. But she has to entertain so many ministers at conference time; and ministers are awfully particular about their pickles.

MISS W. Yes; especially their sweet pickles.

MRS. L. I don't think Mrs. Davis is extravagant. I'm sure she works hard enough.

MISS W. Yes; she does.

MRS. L. She can't come to this meeting because she's all tired out with the ministers they've had staying there conference week.

MRS. HOYT. I think, as this is a business meeting, she might have made a special effort.

(*The clock strikes five.*)

MRS. B. Goodness! It's five o'clock.

MISS GRAY. This meeting was called at three o'clock sharp; and we haven't done a thing yet.

MRS. HOYT. We should have if the meeting had been called to order.

MRS. S. I thought I'd wait a few minutes until the ladies got ready.

(*She takes her place behind the table. The ladies arrange themselves so as half to face her, but without turning too much away from the audience. MRS. S. takes the gavel, and stands waiting.*)

MISS G. (*to Miss K.*). I'm sorry to trouble you, Miss Keene, but I shall have to come here.

Miss K. (*rising*). Oh, certainly. I wouldn't be secretary for anything.

(*She exchanges chairs with Miss G.*)

Mrs. Hen. (*aside to Miss S.*). She wanted to be secretary awfully.

Miss S. She always sits down in the secretary's chair, so that if Selina Gray doesn't come she may be chosen.

Mrs. S. (*rapping with gavel*). The meeting will please come to order. I wish to say, ladies, that I hope this meeting will be conducted on strictly business principles. There has been quite a good deal of talk lately in Rosedale about our not knowing anything about how to conduct business.

Mrs. C. Yes; my husband laughs when I tell him about our business meetings. He says we act just like a parcel of hens.

Miss S. He has no respect for womanhood. I hope it isn't because he judges us all by his wife.

Miss K. If I had a husband who made a remark like that I'd be ashamed to repeat it.

Mrs. C. You might be willing to repeat 'most anything to let folks know you had a husband: you, and Araminta Sharp, too.

Miss K. I'd rather have none than one that abuses women.

Mrs. S. (*pounding*). Ladies, ladies, will you please come to order! The secretary will now read the report of the last meeting.

Miss G. (*reads*). Monday, April 3.—Meeting called to order by the President. The records read and approved. There being no quorum present it was unanimously voted to hold the next meeting on Thursday, as that day is more convenient for the members. On motion of Mrs. Mercy Browne, voted to appoint a committee of one to take charge of the Art Department of the Fair. Mrs. Browne kindly volunteered to serve as that committee. Adjourned.

Mrs. S. The record is approved if nobody objects. 'Tis a vote unless doubted.

Miss S. Oh, nobody could doubt it; it sounds so natural.

Miss W. Yes; doesn't it?

Mrs. S. There is really so much business to come before this meeting, ladies, that I can't tell where to begin; and I'd be greatly obliged if some one would make a motion, just to start things.

MISS K. A motion to put things in motion.

(She looks about as if expecting applause. The ladies smile at her vaguely. Suddenly a look of intelligence appears on the face of MRS. S.)

MRS. S. Motion—motion! Very good, Miss Keene.

MISS W. What a good joke!

MISS G. My cousin in Boston—that is, she isn't my real cousin, but a step-cousin by marriage; her stepfather married my mother's half-sister, but I always call her cousin—she was at a concert once, and she made an awfully good joke. I don't remember exactly what it was now, but it was awfully funny. It was something about music, and we all laughed.

MISS S. It doesn't seem to me that Boston jokes will help the Fair much; and I move, Mrs. President—if I don't make a motion I'm sure I don't know who will—that the Fair be held the thirtieth of April.

MISS W. I second the motion.

MRS. S. It is moved and seconded that the Fair be held on the thirtieth of April; but I'm sure the twenty-third would suit me a great deal better.

MISS K. Why not have it on the twentieth? I'm sure that's late enough.

MRS. B. Oh, dear, no. I never could get half the things for my department done by that time. I move we have it the twenty-ninth.

MISS W. Second the motion.

MRS. S. It is moved and seconded that the Fair be held on the twenty-ninth; and perhaps we'd better compromise on the twenty-fifth. If that be your minds you will please signify it. It is a vote.

MISS S. I shall stick to the thirtieth. I'll have the candy-table then, whether we have the rest of the Fair or not.

MISS K. "Sweets to the sweet."

MRS. HOYT. The thirtieth is Sunday, anyway.

MISS S. I don't believe it, and I don't care if it is. I shall have my part of the Fair then.

MISS W. Oh, not really?

MRS. S. Suppose we compromise, and say the twenty-eighth. That hasn't been mentioned yet. It is a vote unless doubted. Please put it down at once, Miss Secretary.

MRS. C. I heard yesterday that they advertise granulated

sugar at five cents and a half at the Blue Store over at Bloomfield.

MRS. HEN. Did you? I've a great mind to send over after some.

MRS. L. We shall want a lot for the cooking for the Fair.

MISS S. Yes, especially for the candy; though, of course, for a Fair you can use cornstarch in the candy some. That saves a good deal.

MISS W. Yes; it must.

MRS. S. There'll have to be a general committee of arrangements. I suppose it is customary for the chair to appoint them, but I'm ready to receive nominations.

MRS. B. I nominate Miss Keene.

MISS W. I second the nomination.

MRS. S. Miss Keene will have enough to do at the cake-table. I think I'll appoint Mrs. Hoyt, Mrs. Crowler, Mrs. Henderson and Mrs. Lowell.

MISS S. There's never but three on that committee. You'll have to take off one.

MRS. S. Dear me! You must be mistaken. Besides, what difference does it make anyway?

MISS S. It isn't parliamentary. You said you wanted this meeting to be very strict.

MRS. S. Perhaps one of the ladies would be willing to resign. (*A pause, during which they look at one another.*) Well, perhaps it is better for one of the ladies to regard herself as a substitute, in case one of the others should be unable to serve.

MISS S. Which one is the substitute?

MRS. S. I should prefer that they should settle that among themselves.

MRS. HEN. Speaking of substitutes reminds me. Did you know that you can make mince-pies without meat? My niece from Bangor told me about it.

MRS. C. Oh, I've known that for ever so long; but I don't think they've much taste. My husband says they taste just like being asleep in church.

MRS. HEN. Why, what does he mean? How can a thing taste like being asleep? There isn't any taste to being asleep.

MRS. C. Oh, he doesn't mean anything. It's just one of his jokes.

MRS. HOYT. I don't regard it right to jest about the church.

MRS. C. Oh, my husband doesn't mean any harm. He must make jokes.

MISS W. Yes, some men are that way. (*The ladies converse in groups.*)

MISS G. (to MRS. S.). Have we done anything yet I ought to have put down except to fix the day?

MRS. S. We chose a general committee. Ladies, will you please attend to business? We really must have more committees. Will somebody make a motion?

MRS. L. Will you please wait while I show Miss Keene a tidy my cousin in Boston sent me? She wants to make one like it for the Fair, and I know I shall forget it if I don't do it now. It's up-stairs. [Exit.

MRS. B. I am glad if somebody has a new tidy pattern. I almost felt as if we couldn't have a Fair this year, the old patterns have got so common.

MRS. C. Yes, it seems providential.

MISS S. Because we must have the Fair on account of the church debt.

MISS W. Of course we must.

Reenter MRS. L. with the tidy. They cluster about her, all talking at once. Exclamations of "How sweet!" "How awfully pretty!" "It doesn't look hard to do," and so on, are heard from the group of ladies. At last MRS. S. raps vigorously, and the ladies slowly resume their seats, MRS. L. holding up the tidy, and the rest admiring it.

MRS. S. Ladies, will you please come to order. Somebody, please, make a motion.

MRS. HEN. I don't think Friday's a good day for a fair, anyway. The twenty-eighth is Friday.

MRS. C. Oh, we shall be all tired out for baking-day.

MRS. L. I never thought of that. That'll never do.

MISS W. Oh, never in this world.

MRS. S. (*dropping into her chair*). Really, I don't see what we can do. There seem to be so many days and only one Fair; and we've had so many dates proposed.

MRS. HEN. Well, we can't have the Fair Friday.

MRS. S. Then we shall have to unvote something.

MRS. HOYT. I move the previous question.

(*There is a moment of silence in which they all regard Mrs.*

HOYT in doubt and wonder. She sits up very straight, and is evidently conscious of having made a sensation.)

Miss W. (*falteringly*). I second the motion—if that's right.

Mrs. S. I—I don't think that I quite understand.

Mrs. HOVT. I moved the previous question.

Miss S. (*aside to Miss K.*). That's what comes of having a husband that was almost nominated for Representative.

Miss K. (*aside to Miss S.*). And has called himself the Honorable ever since.

Mrs. S. The previous question, did you say?

Mrs. HOVT. That takes us back to the beginning; and then we can change the date of our Fair in a strictly legal way.

Mrs. S. It is moved and seconded the previous question. It is a vote.

Mrs. HOVT (*looking about with a conciliating smile*). I don't think we'd better do away with everything in this case. We might let the committee of arrangements stand.

Miss K. (*aside*). That's the one she's chairman of.

Miss S. (*looking abstractedly at the ceiling*). I don't remember that there's anything in the by-laws about the previous question.

(*A general flutter. All look at Mrs. HOVT, who draws herself up majestically.*)

Mrs. HOVT. I supposed everybody knew that the rules of making motions don't have to be in the by-laws. They are in—in Cavendish's Manual.

(*A sensation. The members nod to each other as if they had always known this, and smile sarcastically on Miss S.*)

Miss S. (*muttering*). I'm glad I don't know so much as some folks pretend to.

Mrs. HEN. It does seem to me that we might let this one year go without a Fair. There's been so much sickness in Rosedale this winter that everybody's tired out, and we had a great deal better wait till June, and then have a Strawberry Festival. I move we put the whole thing off till then.

Miss W. I second the motion.

Mrs. S. I cannot consent to put that motion. We have made up our minds to have a Fair now, and we may as well have it and be done with it.

MRS. B. I move that we have a Fair and a Strawberry Festival.

MISS W. I second the motion.

MRS. S. It is moved and seconded that we have a Fair and a Strawberry Festival ; but that seems a good deal ; and I think I had better declare it not a vote unless doubted.

MRS. C. Does anybody know how many jars of sweet pickles Mrs. Davis generally makes ?

MISS S. She told me she had made as many as two dozen last year.

SEVERAL VOICES. Two dozen !

MRS. S. Ladies, will you attend to business ?

MRS. L. Now I think of it, I guess I won't be on that committee of arrangements. There'll be an awful lot to do.

MRS. HEN. I won't be on it either. I'll be chairman of the finance committee instead.

MRS. C. Now I think it over, I think I'll resign from the committee. My husband says I'm no good for arranging things.

MRS. S. (*rising with an air of desperation*). But, ladies, that leaves nobody on the committee but Mrs. Hoyt ; and that's all we've accomplished this afternoon except to fix the date.

MISS K. If we've voted " previous question " I don't see but we've still got to decide on the day. All that's undone now.

MRS. HOYT. Certainly ; only when I made the motion I excepted the committee of arrangements.

MISS W. So she did.

MISS K. They've most of them resigned, so it comes to the same thing.

MRS. S. We don't seem to have anything fixed. If somebody would make a motion —

MISS S. It's too late to make any more motions to-day. It's ten minutes of six.

(All the ladies start to their feet, exclaiming : " Oh, is it so late ! " " I had no idea of it ! " " I must go this minute ! " MRS. S. drops the gavel and hurries towards the door. MISS G. runs after her, the paper on which she has been writing in her hand, and catches MRS. S. by the arm.)

MISS G. Mrs. Smithe ! Oh, Mrs. Smithe !

MRS. S. Oh, don't stop me now. I promised my husband



faithfully I wouldn't be a minute later than half-past five and he'll be as cross as a bear.

MISS G. But what shall I put in the records? I haven't got anything but "previous question."

MRS. S. Oh, put in anything you like; only be sure and say we adjourned. The record must be businesslike.

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DR. FAUNCE RHINESTONE, who keeps an auto.

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GWENDOLYN DASHFORTH, niece to Colonel Penuckle.
BOSTONIA JOUGHNZ, friend of Gwendolyn.
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